

What to Do When Life Feels Like More Than You Can Handle

When my daughter was born with Down syndrome I felt devastated about her diagnosis. I cried constantly, and I struggled to find hope as I pictured our lives in the days, months and years to come.

One night, as I climbed into bed, I turned to my husband who was ready to go to sleep. I was exhausted by my sadness, and I knew he noticed it too.

"The Bible says that God does not give us more than we can handle, right?" I asked him.

He turned and looked at me, silent for a while.

"That verse refers to temptation. God will not give us more *temptation* than we can handle." He said, "It is a verse too often taken out of context."

"Well what about *this*. What about *us*?" I asked, "Does God give us more than we can handle when it comes?"

My husband, knowing what was in my heart, gently said, "Yes, honey, I think so. I think often in life we are given more than we can handle. If we could handle life on our own we would not need God. But when we are given more than we can handle, it is then, and only then, that we realize how much we need Him. We need Him to take over, to lead us and take control of our lives."

His words were new to me. When life gets hard, when there are losses, when there are challenging family issues, when devastating circumstances beat us down, when personal problems continue to build or when the simple fact that life is hard and messy threaten to make us into a helpless punching bag,

I've so often heard, "God does not give us more than we can handle." Words that are meant to encourage, to give hope, perhaps remind us that we are strong and maybe we don't know it yet, but God does. Yet I knew I wasn't strong, and God knew it too.

"I think this is more than I can handle," I said with tears in my eyes.

"I know," Andy said as he reached his hand to hold mine.

"And I need Him to step in, or I am going to lose it," I continued.

"That's what He wants to do, hun. He wants to take over and carry you through this."

This new understanding of God suddenly allowed me to let go. I had permission to feel what I was feeling, to acknowledge that I had no idea how to parent or love my baby who was born with a disability. God did not have a list of expectations for me, the only thing He wanted was for me to trust that He would carry me through the grief and loss.

I did not have to be strong because God would be strong for me. I did not have to find the *why* because God does not make mistakes and He loves with unconditional love. I did not have to carry the grief and the loss on my own because God would not only help me with the load, He would turn my heart around and show me the precious gift I'd been given through my child.

My daughter is now six-and-a-half years old. It would be tempting for someone to look at the person I am today—so different from the person I was before and during the period of grief and struggle—and think, "See, you were stronger than you thought, God did not give you more than you could handle, he trusted you with your child because He knew you could do it." But that would not be true.

If I am strong in any way, it is because I had His strength. If I can handle anything in life, it is because He carries me through it. If I am a different person today, it is because He has changed me. I don't have to handle life on my own, thank goodness! God handles it for me, and in the process He transforms me, leads me and loves me abundantly.

And when life gets tough, when it feels like it is more than I can handle, I turn it over to Him, "It's yours Lord! You take it, and you carry me through this."

Author's note: Wonder where the idea that "God does not gives us more than we can handle" comes from? It is from the verse in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that says, "The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure" (NLT). Somehow we changed the meaning of this verse to a Christian cliché that is intended to make us feel better, or stronger, or else it makes us feel like we must be missing something because it does feel like our circumstances and suffering are more than we can handle. But God does give us more than we can handle. 2 Corinthians 1:9 tells us that, "In fact, we expected to die. But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead" (NLT). So rely on God, friend, only on God, because He is the one that can handle it!

*Adapted from **Ellen Stumbo's** blog, *Finding Beauty in Brokenness*. Ellen is a pastor's wife and she writes about finding beauty in brokenness with gritty honesty and openness. She is passionate about sharing the real—sometimes beautiful and sometimes ugly—aspects of faith, parenting, special needs and adoption. She has been published in Focus on the Family, LifeWay, MomSense, Not Alone and Mamapedia, among others.*